

The Sydney Morning Herald Saturday 16 February 1946

The Massacre of the Boyd

By GEORGE MACKANESS

"The ship Boyd, from Cork, with a detachment of his Majesty's 73rd Regiment, arrived here (Sydney) on the 14th of August (1809) last and landed 137 male convicts (having lost five by death on the passage)." So wrote Lieutenant Governor William Paterson to Lord Castlereagh.

Though the Boyd left Sydney again for England early in the following November, she never arrived, for, as Governor Macquarie reported on March 12, 1810: "A Colonial ship, named the King George, arrived here from off the coast of New Zealand, brings the melancholy accounts of the loss and capture of the ship Boyd by the New Zealanders, under their Chief Tippahee, and the massacre of the whole of her Crew and Passengers, with the exception of two women and a child."

Such is the bare statement. What is the story behind it all? Unfortunately, though there exist several contemporary accounts, these show many conflicting details which cannot be reconciled. However, the main features are fairly clear.

@

As soon as he received the report, Macquarie instructed Mr. Robert Campbell, then Naval Officer at Sydney, to investigate the matter. From Captain Samuel Ohase of the King George he ascertained that, on February 19, he had made contact with two whaling vessels, the Albion and the Ann; that by Captain Gwynn of the latter he had been informed that, at the Bay of Islands, which they had left the previous day, the natives had captured the Boyd at a port 30 miles to the north called Whangaroa, and that every person belonging to the ship (except two women and a child) had been massacred.

For an important link in the story we must go back to 1805. In that year, Tippahee, an important Maori chief of the Bay of Islands, who, according to Governor King, had always been spoken of in terms of the highest gratitude by the commanders of South Sea whalers, and who had rendered them every possible assistance, had, with his four sons and two attendants, embarked on the whaler Venus, for a visit to Norfolk Island. Thence, they came on H.M.S. Buffalo to Sydney, where they arrived on November 27, 1805. Tippahee remained in the colony till the following February, when he returned to New Zealand in the colonial vessel Lady Nelson, specially detailed for the service by Governor King. During the visit every mark of respect was shown to him, he and one of his sons residing with the Governor, who, on their departure, loaded them with presents. So much for the prologue.

When the Boyd reached the Bay of Islands, her captain, John Thompson, proceeded to Whangaroa Harbour to obtain spars. For these he applied to the natives, who promised help, but suggested that he should accompany them to a particular site.

Accordingly, leaving a part of his crew on board overhauling and repairing the rigging, Thompson and his chief officer, with either two or three boats manned, were prevailed upon to leave their ship, accompanied by a number of natives in canoes.

This was on the second morning after their arrival. Up to that time everything had been very friendly and without any signs of disturbances. Early in the morning, Tippahee himself had arrived and gone on board the Boyd, where he did not stay very long, but remained in his canoe alongside the ships, accompanied by a crowd of natives gathered apparently for trade. Many others had boarded the vessel and were sitting about on the decks.

Captain Thompson and his crews in the boats, were conducted by the Maoris up a river well out of sight of the ship, and invited to land and select their spars. They did so and were led through the woods, ostensibly to examine spars, but in reality to allow time for the tide to ebb, thus leaving the boats high and dry and useless for escape. The natives then "threw off the mask," became insolent and rude, in opprobrious terms began to upbraid Captain Thompson for maltreating some of their number, and told him plainly that all the spars he would get would be those he could cut down for himself.

@

THOMPSON did not appear much concerned at his failure, but with his men turned back towards the boats. Then the attack began, sudden and swift, the Maoris producing clubs and axes concealed behind their robes. Though the boat's crew possessed several muskets, so impetuous was the onset that all were cut down before they had a chance to fire a shot. Thompson and the entire boats' crews were murdered on the spot; and, says the chronicler, "their bodies were afterwards devoured, by the murderers."

Clothing themselves in the white men's apparel the Maoris waited till the tide rose in the evening, launched the boats and returned to the ship. On arrival it was fairly dark - the second officer, unsuspecting, hailed the boats, the crew of which said that they had brought a load of spars, but that the captain and his men had decided to camp ashore. Accordingly the natives came on board, immediately killing the second officer, who was the only one there to bar their progress. Apparently, too, there was some collaboration with those natives who were still on board the ship.

The crew was immediately overcome by the weight of numbers and murdered to a man. Some of the Maoris then went down to the cabin where a few of the passengers had taken refuge and ordered them on deck "to see the spars." One woman was killed going up the cabin ladder.

As the others, some of whom were already in bed, ventured out to discover the cause of the disturbance, they were in turn slain, all except four or five who climbed up the rigging, where they remained all night in terror.

Early next morning, Tippahee appeared alongside the ship. According to one account he seized a speaking trumpet and ordered the refugees up in the shrouds to come down, promising them that, if they did so, they would not be hurt. When they did so, they were carried ashore, slain at once, and, after their arms and legs had been cut off, were roasted and eaten. Another account, which is corroborated by Rev. Samuel Marsden, whose evidence, however, cannot be considered reliable, since five years passed before he collected his information, asserts that when Tippahee appeared next morning, he was much offended at what had happened; that he was not allowed to interfere or remain near the ship; that the men in the rigging managed to get down and join him in his canoe; that they were all overtaken, and cut to pieces, while Tippahee was forcibly restrained from interfering to save them.

ACCORDING to the report of Captain Gwynn given to Captain Chase, Tippahee returned to the Boyd, took possession, plundered the vessel, and then burnt her to the water's edge, "the tops then remaining above water." In the Sydney Gazette of September 1, 1810, we get another slant on the story. There it is asserted that Tippahee was allowed by the Whangarooans to take away three boatloads of goods, but no firearms or gunpowder; that the salt provisions, flour, and spirits were thrown over as unpalatable; that the bulk of the rest was divided amongst them that in their anxiety to secure muskets one of them exploded over a cask of gunpowder, killing five native women and eight or nine men.

Having heard the news of the massacre, and of the cannibal feasts. Captain Simeon Pattison, of the ship City of Edinburgh, then in New Zealand waters, determined to make an investigation. Accompanied by his chief officer, James Russell, Mr. Alexander Berry, supercargo, and Matingaro, a friendly chief of the Bay of Islands, on December 31, 1809, they set out in three armed boats for Whangaroa Harbour, where they found "the miserable remains" of the Boyd, stripped of everything of value and burnt down to the water's edge. Through the good offices of Matingaro, they were able to rescue a boy, a woman, and two children, the sole survivors of the tragedy, which, according to the observers, "was perpetrated entirely under the directions of that old rascal Tippahee, who has been so much and undeservedly caressed at Port Jackson." Here again, then, there is a conflict in the details of the crime. The names of the survivors are given as Mrs. Morley and child. Betsey Broughton, daughter of Deputy Commissioner Broughton, and a boy named Thomas Dans.

Three months later, on March 26, 1810, six captains of South Sea whalers, coming with their ships into the Bay of Islands, learned of "the inhuman massacre," and sent their respective boats' crews ashore to seek for survivors and to recover any arms, ammunition, or warlike stores in the hands of the savages. They found the Maoris in hostile array, and prepared to dispute the landing. Mr. William Leith, supercargo of the Speke, writing to his owners, Simeon Lord, Williams', and Thompson, set down the tale of vengeance taken on the Maoris, telling how the boats from the various ships attacked and wounded Tippahee, destroyed his houses and property, and killed some sixty of his people; that the Boyd's long boat and some other articles were recovered; that the English losses were one seaman accidentally killed and a few slightly wounded; that Tippahee made his escape to Wongaboolah.

@

WHAT was the cause of the massacre? Here again there are conflicting accounts. In the narrative printed in the "Sydney Gazette" it is stated definitely that on the Boyd's voyage from Sydney, four or five young Maoris on board were so badly treated by Captain Thompson, that on their arrival at the Bay of Islands they complained to their relatives and friends at Whangaroa, to the tribe of which they belonged, and that the latter determined, in revenge, to take the ship. This opinion is supported by the Rev. Samuel Marsden, who wrote to Macquarie saying that "the Europeans had been the first aggressors; that he had met one chief in New Zealand who had sailed in the Boyd; and that on the voyage corporal punishment had been severely inflicted on him," a statement which he repeats in one of his letters, asserting, too, that the whites had been guilty of "committing great depredations" on the property of the Maori tribes. There is, however, still another story, one told by George Bruce, who

accompanied Tippahee in the Lady Nelson, and who remained in New Zealand, where he married Tippahee's daughter. He asserts that he and his wife were enticed on board a ship called the General Wellesley, and carried off to the Moluccas, and that it was in revenge for the loss of his daughter that Tippahee attacked the Boyd.

To make sure that no further attacks should occur, Macquarie issued a proclamation warning the masters of all whaling ships to take particular precautions against attacks by the New Zealanders.